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Rep. Johnson Works to Stop Identity Theft *House Panel Passes Bill to Protect Social Security Numbers*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With the strong support of Congresswoman Nancy Johnson, the House Ways and Means Committee today passed legislation to stop identity theft by protecting Americans' Social Security numbers.

"Americans deserve strong protections against identity theft," Johnson said. "Identity theft can destroy someone's credit and saddle them with tremendous debt. Rebuilding your identity can be a nightmare. This common sense bill increases protections for Social Security numbers and strengthens consumer rights so private information stays private."

Identity theft is the fastest growing white-collar crime, costing individual victims \$5 billion and businesses \$50 billion annually. The average victim spends \$500 and 30 hours clearing their record and rebuilding their identity.

Social Security numbers (SSN) were created for the sole purpose of tracking workers' earnings but have been used as a general identification number for Americans. Theft and misuse of SSNs allow criminals to engage in fraud relating to credit card use and the issuance of loans and benefits.

In order to better protect Americans and strengthen their rights, the *Social Security Privacy and Identify Theft Prevention Act of 2004* takes the following steps:

- Limits access to SSNs by restricting the sale, purchase, or public display (including the Internet) of SSNs, and imposing penalties on businesses that deny services to customers that refuse to provide his or her information, unless required by law;
- Protects individuals by prohibiting persons from obtaining SSNs to find a person with the intent to physically injure or harm them;
- Tightens SSN controls by restricting issuance of multiple replacement cards, requiring verification of birth records, and improving the process for issuing SSNs to newborns;
- Enforces restrictions through new civil and criminal penalties for violations.

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